

The Aftermath of a Storm

by jessieng

Category: How to Train Your Dragon
Genre: Friendship, Romance
Language: English
Characters: Astrid, Hiccup
Status: In-Progress
Published: 2014-06-23 05:33:50
Updated: 2014-07-15 05:51:33
Packaged: 2016-04-26 19:18:51
Rating: T
Chapters: 8
Words: 19,614
Publisher: www.fanfiction.net
Summary: Love, dragons, grief. The life of a chief. POST-HTTYD2!
BEWARE OF SPOILERS!

1. The Aftermath of a Storm

****My first fanfic. Hope you all enjoy :)****

****Disclaimer: Surprise, I don't own How to Train Your Dragon!****

* * *

><p>Astrid looked upon the clouds in deep reminiscence. The coral shades darkening against the sinking sun recaptured the beauty of the night her life had changed forever. She could still feel the thrill of her first flight over Berk, of the wonder that came with touching the sky.<p>

No matter how many times she had flown through the heavens, nothing seemed to compare to that first flight. It was just so romantic.

_Gods, that's so cheesy, _Astrid grinned as she guided Stormfly toward a mountain ledge on the horizon.

When the blue beauty landed, Astrid dismounted and sprawled out upon the lush green grass. It was rare that she ever admired a simple sunset. Life as a viking, and as of recently, a chief's girlfriend, rarely gave you the opportunity to dwell upon nature's exquisiteness.

She peeped down at the empty space around her, and felt a small tugging at her heart. Let's face it, she missed Hiccup. A lot. It wasn't like she didn't get to see him. In fact, she saw him almost all the time now, flying around the village. He'd always greet her with a nice, "Hey there, milady" or a quick peck on the cheek, but

was it selfish to miss having alone time?

As the stars began to appear, Astrid felt melancholy gripping her insides. She knew the legends, how the great kings of late found their final resting place amongst the bright twinkling lights.

The concept was enchantingâ€¦ Until you experienced the aftermath of what a new star left behind.

She hated that he had to be strong. Ever since Hiccup had become chief, he had put his people's needs before everything, including his own. He never showed weakness, he never shed a tear, he never grieved.

She understood why. Hiccup wanted the people of Berk to know he was capable of every hardship thrown his way. That meant every hour of his day was devoted to Berk. When it wasn't, it was his alone time, something Astrid never intruded upon.

Still, she missed the simpler times.

The sound of flapping wings approaching broke her out of her reflection. Sitting up, she spotted a black mass illuminated in the moonlight. It was accompanied by a peg-legged Viking that happened to make her heartbeat raise.

"There's milady," Hiccup smirked as he landed Toothless next to Stormfly.

"What brings you out here?" Astrid grinned, looking back at Hiccup as he approached.

"Your mother. She says you've been out all day and never checked in."

He used her shoulder for support as he crouched down beside her and gave her a kiss on the cheek, "So what have you been up to?"

"Oh, nothing much. I ran a couple errands to set-up training for next week, and then spent the rest of my day exploring and thinking."

"How are the training preparations coming along?"

"Pretty well, although that's the last thing I wanna talk about right now. You should take a break from being chief and tell me what's going on in that big head of yours," Astrid teased, playfully fluffing the hair on the top of his head.

He chuckled, grabbing the hand off the top of his head and interlocking fingers with it. She studied his face, a plethora of emotions swimming across it as he gazed at their hands.

It made her heart ache.

"I've definitely had better days."

Astrid scooted closer, resting her head on his shoulder as a way to urge him on.

He sighed, "I wake up some mornings wishing I could just run away from it all, y'know? I go outside and I see the horizon and I just want to fly into it and never comeback."

He paused, trying to form words that could express the thoughts that had been trapped in his head for so long.

"Then, I hear you in the distance or I see Mom playing with Cloud Jumper, and I know where my place is. I guess... what I'm trying to say is... I wish I hadn't become chief under the circumstances I did. I wish I hadn't been rushed into it. It's one of those things that's easier to grow into and I feel like I was never given that chance. I mean, what I wouldn't give to have Dad here advising me! I wishâ€¦|" He took a deep breath, "I just wish he was still here."

Astrid was at a loss of words. Not because she didn't expect any of this from him or didn't feel it herself, but because she didn't know how to say what Hiccup needed to hear. She didn't even know what SHE needed to hear. Every possibility only left her feeling more somber.

Instead, she guided him down to lay on the grass with her. In silence, they peered up at the resting kings twinkling down from Valhalla. She felt Hiccup squeeze her hand, assuring her that silence was enough to console the grief he felt if she was beside him.

Astrid dwelled upon how far they had come. From that romantic flight to this perch on a lone mountain, many things had changed in the world around them that would forever keep their paths twisting and turning. If there was one solace in a world of adventure and uncertainty though, it was that their love for each other would outlast every single setback.

* * *

><p>Sooo, did that satisfy your feels? Let me know by reviewing! :D

2. Complicated

Thank you to Riverrat73, Kazuya RandomAuthor, Foxlight the Dragon Trainer, and SapphiresAndPineapples for the kind reviews!

Thank you to JeanieLee, Newbie23, Saphirabrightscale, SapphiresAndPineapples, WikiSorcerer, and sirocc for the favorites!

**Lastly, thank you to Ali-Apple, Saphirabrightscale, WikiSorcerer, dragonsaremyguardians, , and sirocc for the follows! **

You all brought a smile to my face :)

I hope you enjoy!

Disclaimer: Again, I do not own How to Train Your Dragon! *insert sad face*

* * *

><p>"Since I can't assist you with Dragon Training as much now, I've given Ruffnut the job."<p>

Astrid couldn't believe what she was hearing.

"Hiccup. Babe. That is the WORST idea I've have ever heard. Ever."

"And why's that? She knows her stuff well enough. Besides, she jumped at the offer."

"Maybe because a certain Eret, Son of Eret will be one of her students," she replied, leaning on the table and crossing her arms in frustration.

Hiccup looked up from his workbench puzzled.

"I thought she was all over Snotlout and Fishlegs now."

"You would think so, but no."

"Well, I already promised her a shot at it. Maybe she'll surprise you."

"Hiccuuuupppp..."

She gave her signature pout, the one that more often than not willed Hiccup into giving her what she wanted.

He laughed, standing up and pulling her close by the waist. She blushed as he cupped her face with his right hand and gave her a kiss on the nose.

Then he did the most evil thing you could do to a girl trying to get her way. He gave her his best guilt-tripping pout back.

"No, nope! Not gonna fall for that, Hiccup," she giggled.

He magically seemed to intensify his pout, and Astrid knew she was beat.

"Fineee."

"HA HA! Victory!" he cheered, jumping back and pumping his fists in the air.

Astrid grinned, rolling her eyes at her annoyingly alluring dork of a boyfriend.

"You see that Toothless? She thinks I'm irresistible!" she heard him tease as she walked off to her first training session of the year.

You'll pay for this!

* * *

><p>Things were running pretty smoothly so far. The new trainees consisted of Eret, and a couple of teenagers who had finally reached

the proper training age. Everyone seemed pretty eager to get down to business which pleased Astrid. Nothing compared to having determined, and serious students.<p>

Determined, and serious trainers were a harder thing to come by though.

"Okay, let's break into pairs and practice approaching the dragons!" Ruffnut yelled, "I call Eret!"

Before Astrid could protest, Ruffnut was right at Eret's side. She awkwardly put her arms around him, acting as his guide as they neared Skullcrusher. Eret squirmed a bit, but Ruffnut was stronger than she looked. Even after they had patted Skullcrusher, Ruffnut seemed to forget that her help wasn't need from him anymore.

Better save the poor guy.

"Alright, everyone! Listen up! We're gonna practice properly mounting on our dragons! Ruffnut come over here and show them how it's done!"

Ruffnut gently kissed her hand and smacked it on Eret's lips before she ran over to a Deadly Nadder to demonstrate.

"See, Eret! If I'm this good at riding dragons, imagine how great I'd be-"

"HA HA OKAY! Let's take a short break and feed the dragons!" Astrid interrupted before that conversation got anymore awkward and disturbing.

She quickly scurried over to Ruffnut who was still atop the Deadly Nadder looking dreamily at Eret.

"Listen here, Ruff! You need to stop with this Eret ogling, or by the power of Ægir, I will throw you into the ocean with my bare hands!"

"Wow, so I can't flirt with Eret, but when you and Hiccup flirted it was just fine!"

"Hiccup and I didn't flirt!"

"Oh please, you think we didn't see those 'subtle' touches? And don't even get me started on the teasing!"

Astrid blushed. Okay maybe they had done that occasionally. But they most certainly didn't make advances on each other that completely disrupted training!

"Ruffnut, you're making this more complicated than it needs to be."

"Try and stop me!" Ruffnut replied, jumping off of the Nadder and skipping over to Eret.

Maybe, it was the fact that she was angry and entranced that made Ruffnut accidentally trip over a baby dragons tail. Maybe, it was Astrid hoping she'd fall on her face if she didn't warn her. Either

way, it was all about to go down.

With a screech of alarm, the baby dragon shot a fireball against one of the Nadders. This sent it flying into Skullcrusher who knocked Eret into a Dragon Feeder. Suddenly, all the dragons that were enjoying a nice meal were met with a Viking and not their scrumptious raw fish. Astrid's worst nightmare was about to unveil.

The dragons began reeking havoc amongst the trainees as they flew into walls, tripped over their own feet, and ran into each other. It didn't take very long for the loud commotion to reach the villagers' ears.

Hiccup heard the commotion from his workbench desk, and knew that this was the end for him. Astrid was going to rip him to pieces tonight and feed each limb to Stormfly.

Well, she had warned him.

Jumping on Toothless, he flew as quickly as he could to the source of all the screams and roars.

"This is your time to shine, bud," he said, patting Toothless who immediately put on his Alpha face. With a deafening roar, he stopped in the center of the training arena. The dragons and their riders stilled within seconds. Toothless nodded contently and began directing the rowdy dragons out of the arena.

Hiccup dismounted and surveyed the scene before him. Although he knew a straight face was necessary for the situation, he felt the urge to burst out laughing at the sight before him.

Legs sticking out, Eret was half buried in a Dragon Feeder filled with raw fish. At his side were Astrid and Ruffnut who had been trying to pull him out, with little success. They were covered in fish guts by now, and their clothes were a disheveled mess.

Hiccup hurried over to Eret and helped the girls pull him out with one swift tug. Eret gasped for air as he finally emerged from the pile.

"Yeah, that was definitely not how I was expecting my first day to go. I don't think I'll be able to not smell of fish ever again," he said as he walked away, trying to comb fish chunks out of his hair.

Hiccup looked back at the two girls in front of him and rubbed his head, "Should I even ask what happened?"

Astrid crossed her arms, squinting angrily at Ruffnut who was staring down at her feet in.. was that embarrassment?

"Listen, I'mâ€¦ I'm sorry. I just have trouble thinking straight when he's around. I mean, can you blame a girl for wanting something like what you and Hiccup have?"

Astrid's face instantly turned from rage to guilt. Ruffnut rarely talked about feelings. Astrid seemed to forget that she had been a lot like Ruffnut when Hiccup and her were in that awkward phase of their relationship. Maybe not with the obnoxious gazing and crazy

flirting, but we all expressed affection differently.

"Look, I'm sorry too. I guess I never really thought about how annoying Hiccup and I were when we started out. And you guys put up with us without even saying a word," she punched her arm in affection and gestured to Eret, "You should go help him clean out his hair. And I'll see you at training tomorrow!"

"If you didn't smell so bad right now, I might actually hug you," Ruffnut replied, punching Astrid back before she ran off towards Eret.

Hiccup coughed awkwardly from behind. Astrid immediately flipped around and put her hands on her hips, "Is this the part where I say 'I told you so?'"

He chuckled nervously, waiting for Astrid to pounce at him with razor sharp claws.

Instead, he was surprised as Astrid pulled him over by the waist much like he had earlier. It would've been cute if it weren't for the fact that she was drenched in guts and oil andâ€¦ was that a fish scale in her hair?

"You know, she said everyone could see through our little 'games' we played when we were trainers together."

"Wait, what?!" Hiccup blushed embarrassedly.

"There's no one around now. We could continue just like old times."

"Why don't you clean up a bit first and then-"

"Nope, we're doing it now. It's your punishment for not listening."

Hiccup weighed the options in his head. If he said she smelled too bad, he would most definitely lose his other leg. If he played their little game, he'd probably have to wash up too by the end. That wasn't necessarily a bad thing though.

Before he could say anything, the taste of seafood and raw meat met his lips as his "punishment" commenced.

* * *

><p>Hope you enjoyed! I know I did. :D Feel free to favorite, follow, and review!

3. Making History

Oh my goodness, you guys make me so happy. :3 Thank you to all the new favorites, follows, and reviews! You are my motivation!

Disclaimer: What's that, Jess? You don't own How to Train Your Dragon? That would be correct!

* * *

><p>Hiccup woke up with a nervous pang in his stomach. It had been resting inside him since he had made the announcement three short weeks ago. Today was the day Berk would play host to the first ever Dragon Festival!<p>

It sounded like a wonderful idea at the time. The Hooligan tribe had been pulled through the ringer these past two months. Accepting a new chief, mourning the old one, cleaning up and rebuilding almost every house on the island, and making a home for the dragons from the Bewilderbeast's Sanctuary had left everyone exhausted. Today was the day that would change! If he could get out of bed, of course.

Hiccup rolled his back toward the door when he heard the sound of footsteps ascending the stairway to his bedroom.

"Good morning, sleepyhead. Your Mom and I made some breakfast to cure your morning breath."

Hiccup couldn't help but grin at the sound of his teasing girlfriend. He felt her sit next to him, and received a nice slap on the head when he didn't turn over.

"Okay, ouch!" he said, as he rubbed the back of his head, "If violence is the only way for you to get me out of bed, send Mom up next time instead."

"The slap was your Mom's idea. I thought a punch to the stomach would do you one better."

Hiccup sat up and took a deep yawn. He felt Astrid run her fingers through his hair to clean up what was probably a disastrous bedhead. He sighed with contentment, resting his eyes upon the tray in her lap.

"Breakfast in bed? You must feel a great deal of pity for me to be this nice."

"I know how nervous you are about this," she replied as she handed him the tray, "You have nothing to worry about though. The village is so excited. They've needed a day like this, with all that's happened."

"Things are bound to go wrong."

"And if they do, we'll figure it out. It's just a festival."

"A festival where we happened to invite three neighboring tribes. This is their chance to discover we're an easy target to attack. I'm gonna look like a bumbling novice to them and"

He was silenced with a kiss.

"Shut up, and eat your breakfast."

He chuckled and did as he was told.

Although his appetite was small, and even more so because the breakfast was rather over AND under-cooked (he wasn't aware that was

possible until now), Astrid didn't leave his side until she was satisfied that he'd had enough.

When she retreated back downstairs, Hiccup looked over at Toothless who had been observing from afar.

"Never eat their food if you have the choice, bud. I'm gonna have a stomach ache for the rest of my life."

The dragon snickered, and walked over to Hiccup. He nudged the Viking's side affectionately, then journeyed downstairs toward the laughter of his two favorite ladies.

Hiccup dressed to impress and undid the braids that Astrid must have placed in his hair when she was running her fingers through it earlier. He took a deep breath, and felt his nerves subside for that short second.

_You can do this. _

Hiccup stepped downstairs and watched as his mom and Astrid cleaned up the kitchen, chatting happily. If he had any consolation during these past two months, it was how well the two got along.

"Ah, there's the pride of Berk!"

"Mom, you know I hate it when you call me that."

"Do you prefer Dragon Master?"

"Or Alpha?" Astrid interjected.

"You two get along WAY too well," Hiccup laughed as he gestured for Toothless to join him outside.

"Fly safe!" he heard them yell in unison as he closed the door.

"How about a nice flight around the island, bud?"

Toothless skipped over eagerly, and waited for Hiccup to hop on his back. Then, they were off!

From above, Hiccup could see the preparations from the past week all set forth. Colorful banners decorated the houses with welcome signs scattered throughout. Toward the back of the village there was a large field decorated with red fencing. It would be home to the dance square and concession area.

Hiccup looked toward the horizon of the ocean, knowing that ships would soon appear with guests that he would have to greet and entertain. Many of them were relatives or good friends of the tribe. Some were newcomers who were thrilled to meet the dragons and their owners. Either way, those anxious feelings from earlier soon returned.

Toothless soon rounded toward his father's memorial statue and landed at its feet. The dragon had made a habit of visiting it ever since it had been constructed. Hiccup knew that deep down, Toothless was still having trouble coping with what he had been willed to do. Even though Hiccup still treated him the same as before, he thought he saw a

sadness in the Night Fury's eyes every once in a while. A pinch of grief struck his heart as he watched the dragon bow his head in respect. Hiccup endeavored to do the same.

"I miss you more everyday," he whispered, "It would mean a lot if you wished me luck as I endeavor to not embarrass myself today. Hopefully some of the other tribes will think I'm at least half the great chief you were."

He was broken out of his one-sided conversation when he felt Toothless jerk his head toward the ocean. Three small ship could be seen approaching.

Hiccup guided Toothless toward the docks where he saw his mother and Astrid waiting patiently.

"What are you two doing here?"

"Did you think you'd be greeting our guests by yourself?! You're just like your father. Crazy man never asked for help for anything, 'specially when he needed it!" Valka winked as she grabbed Hiccup's arm and directed him toward the wooden deck.

"Time to put on that cheeky smile of yours," Astrid quipped as she pinched his cheek.

Hiccup felt his nerves slowly disappearing as he waited for the ships to arrive with the ones he loved at his side.

* * *

><p>The festival was turning out to be a huge success! Hiccup hadn't had such a great time in gods know how long. He was already certain that this would become an annual tradition. The first of it's kind in fact! And the night wasn't over yet.<p>

The villagers and guests were all gathered in the square enjoying some delicious food prepared by Gobber. There were smiling faces all around as reunited families and friends enjoyed the company of one another. There were even a couple of surprising faces that appeared.

"Hiccup, look who I found!" he heard Astrid yell from behind.

She pulled in tow Heather and a handsome fellow with blonde hair and green eyes.

"Heather? Hey, how are you?" he greeted, giving her a friendly hug.

"Wonderful! It's so nice to see you two. OH, I'd like to introduce to you my husband, Logmar!"

Hiccup nodded kindly and shook the man's hand.

"So how long have you two been married?" Astrid asked.

"It'll be a year in about three weeks," Logmar replied, putting his arm around Heather, "How long have you and Hiccup been married?"

Oh gods...

The atmosphere between the four suddenly grew very awkward. It wasn't that neither of them hadn't thought about marriage. In fact, they thought about it more than they cared to admit. It was their proficiency at avoiding certain subjects of conversation that had never brought the topic up between them before.

"Oh, we're not-"

"Nope, just-"

"What would you call it?"

"Boyfriend and-"

"Girlfriend."

Heather tried to stifle a chuckle but was unsuccessful.

"Well, Logmar and I better get back to our table. It was great catching up!"

There was still a tension in the air as Heather hurried off with her husband. Thankfully, their silence was interrupted by the sound of music beginning to fill the field.

As the sun disappeared and night fell, torches illuminated the dance floor. Chatter, laughter, and sweet melodies could be heard from a mile away.

Hiccup watched as people clapped and stomped their feet to the upbeat rhythms. He spotted Fishlegs prancing around Meatlug, and Ruff dancing with a rather reluctant Eret while Tuff made fun of her from the sidelines. He even saw Snotlout tapping his foot to the beat as he lounged with his family at their table.

The one sight he hadn't prepared his heart for was the blonde at the heart of the square. Hiccup had never seen Astrid so lively and giddy before. It appeared that in the process of dancing, her braid had let loose and sent her hair swimming with each sway of her body. It was enough to keep Hiccup transfixed and oblivious to everything around him.

Valka noticed Hiccup's mesmerized expression and giggled cheerfully. They reminded her so much of her and Stoick in their younger years. She could only imagine how overjoyed Stoick must have been as he watched them fall in love. She wouldn't put it past her if Stoick had made a habit of calling Astrid his future daughter-in-law regularly. If only he could be here now. Oh, the fun they'd have.

When the song finished, Valka made her way up on the band's platform and called for attention. The group quickly grew silent, and focused in on the sweet lady.

"I think we can all agree that our chief has completely surpassed our expectations today!"

The crowd cheered, and clapped toward Hiccup.

"Son, I don't think you realize how proud the people of Berk are to have you as their new leader. Knowing you, you may never be convinced. But as the stars twinkle down upon us tonight, I feel confident that your father is one amongst them, looking at you with an irrevocable love and pride.

"Thank you for your dedication to our people! We look forward to a great future with you at the reigns! As a sign of gratitude, I dedicate this next song in your honor. If you would clear the floor, please!"

The crowd gathered onto the sidelines and watched as Valka pulled her son to the center of the square. They could see his blush grow a deep shade of red as she grabbed Astrid to join him.

Then they were alone, with a familiar theme playing in the background. Hiccup grabbed her hand and gently placed the other on her waist. She placed her hand on his shoulder and gazed into his green eyes with a loving devotion.

They swayed around as the melodic introduction came to a close. Then, Hiccup took a shaky nervous breath,

"_**I'll swim and sail on savage seas**_"

**With ne'er a fear of drowning**"

**And gladly ride the waves of life**"

**If you will marry me.**"

Astrid giggled softly as he twirled her.

"_**No scorching sun**_"

**Nor freezing cold**"

**Will stop me on my journey.**"

He stopped swaying for a minute and looked intently into her eyes.

"_**If you will promise your heart-**_"

She nodded knowingly, and touched his face. She studied every feature before taking a deep breath,

**"And love me for eternity.**"

**My dearest one my darling dear**"

**Your mighty words astound me**"

**But I've no need of mighty deeds**"

**When I feel your arms around me!"**"

The music began to soar as people cheered and clapped along.

"_**But I would bring you rings of gold**_"

**I'd even sing you poetry **
**And I would keep you from all harm**
**If you would stay beside me!"**
"_**I have no use for rings of gold**_
**I care not for your poetry**
**I only want your hand to hold!"**
"_**I only want you near me!"**_

People were dancing on the sidelines now, and Hiccup and Astrid were a giggling mess as they continued in unison,

"_**To love to kiss to sweetly hold**_
**For the dancing and the dreaming**
**Through all life's sorrows and delights**
**I'll keep your love beside me**
**I'll swim and sail on savage seas**
**With ne'er a fear of drowning**
**And gladly ride the waves of life**
**If you will marry me!"**

There was a loud ovation as people joined the couple and continued along with more dances. Hiccup grabbed Toothless and pulled him onto the dance floor as everyone celebrated a new beginning together.

The festival lasted longer than Hiccup had ever expected. By the time everyone had entered their homes and blown out the candles, the moon was already half way across the sky.

To assure that everyone was safe and tucked away, Hiccup made rounds with Toothless one last time. As he suspected, the village was completely tranquil and it made him feel at ease.

Toward the end of their trip, he spotted his father's memorial in the moonlight.

Instead of grief, he felt a bittersweet hopefulness. His mother was right, he could still feel the love his father had for him. It had never left, only been buried under thickets of pain and regret. Hiccup didn't want to feel that any longer. He was ready to move past that stage of sorrow and come one step closer to moving on.

"That's my boy!" he would've said.

"Always," Hiccup replied.

As he landed at his doorstep and walked inside, he missed the sight

of his Dad's twinkling star shining the brightest of them all.

* * *

><p>Ahh, that was so much fun to write! I hope you all enjoyed :) Feel free to favorite, follow, and review!

4. Stories

****You all rock. Plain and simple! :D Thank you to all the new favorites, follows, and reviews!****

****Disclaimer: Do I even need to put this anymore? I do not own How to Train Your Dragon! ****

* * *

><p>So many things had changed since Valka returned to Berk. For one, dragons and Vikings lived in peace. The very idea was something Valka had thought impossible for the longest time. She had tried so hard to convince everyone of unity and failed miserably. Hiccup had done the same and here they were.<p>

She'd heard a brief summary of how dragons had come to live in harmony with the Vikings. She only wished she'd been able to live through it herself. Every time she heard the story, she felt regret boiling inside.

Escape had sounded so right at the time. She couldn't live with herself as the Vikings and dragons brawled for domination. Even with every attempt she made to stop it, she was only met with sneers and disapproving scowls. Was it so wrong that she had felt liberated as Cloudjumper carried her off to a world of wonder and freedom?

It was this stormy afternoon that she realized all that she had missed out on. Her son had grown up without her, something that she could never change. She would only hear stories of those early days and what saddened her was that she would probably never hear all of them. She would never know every detail of what made Hiccup the man he is today.

Valka sat upon Stoick's old chair, searching for comfort. She was met with cool leather and a sinking feeling in her heart.

From above, she could hear a door open and footsteps descending from Hiccup's bedroom stairwell. She looked up to see Astrid smiling happily, a skip in her step.

"Hello, dear. How are things?" Valka greeted with a wave.

"Same as usual. Hiccup seems determined to lose his other leg by trying out this new trick on Toothless later. I would try and stop him but I gave up on that a LONG time ago," Astrid chuckled as she sat down in Hiccup's chair across from Valka, "So... I can't help but notice you look a little troubled. Is everything alright?"

Valka looked down at her fidgeting hands and sighed, "Oh, I don't know. It's just... been kind of hard to see Hiccup all grown up. Since we've reunited I've felt this regret filling me up. I keep

wishing I could take back the years I spent in the nest and use them towards being the mother that Hiccup deserved.

"I mean, I have a son that I barely even know that much about, and he still treats me with a love that I'm not worthy of!"

Astrid felt a deep empathy for the woman in front of her. She reached her hand out and placed it on top of Valka's shaking one.

"You may never get to experience Hiccup's past, but that's the thing. It's in the past. The best thing you can do is love Hiccup now, experience him now, be a mother for him now. You may not feel like it counts but after all that he's been through, he needs that more than ever."

Valka nodded and gave Astrid's hand a squeeze, "I just hope he'll open up to me more. I don't want to rush him, that's the last thing I want to do. I want him to do it on his own accord, when he's ready to talk about things. Maybe then we could move on from all that's holding us back. If anything, I'm glad he's had you there to keep him grounded these past few months. You are one wise lass."

"I know. If only Hiccup would listen."

"Oh, I think he just enjoys pushing your buttons."

"He told me he thinks it's hilarious when I get frustrated with him. He says my expression is scary yet invigorating."

"That boy reminds me so much of Stoick, it's uncanny. Hiccup told me you used to give him that look all the time before you got together."

Astrid blushed, "Well, I'm sure he's at least told you how things were between us before the whole Toothless incident and what not."

Valka paused hesitantly, "I honestly don't know all that much. Hiccup gets all bumbly and hot in the face when I ask him about your relationship."

"That is so typical of him," Astrid giggled, "Well, where do I begin. We grew up together but never really talked much. He was kind of an outsider. He got teased a LOT. I was never really one for making fun of people but I definitely gave him the cold shoulder more than I care to admit. I feel really bad now. He tells me he used to feel extremely isolated. The only people he could really talk to without expecting a mean remark were Fishlegs and Gobber."

"Anyway, we were about fifteen when it all changed. Dragons had completely raided the village and Hiccup had kind of made a mess of things. I guess that's what made Stoick put him in Dragon Training. All the other teens were pretty annoyed but I wasn't worried. As long as he stayed out of my way he wasn't a problem. Things were going great until he started acting really weird and began sneaking off a lot."

"Then, he started doing better than me in Dragon Training which made me incredibly frustrated. When he got chosen to kill the Monstrous Nightmare, you can imagine how furious I was! So, one day I saw him

sneaking off and I followed him. That's when I met Toothless, and boy did we get off on the wrong foot! When I attempted to run away and tell Stoick what Hiccup was hiding, I got swept off my feet and Hiccupâ€¦ He showed me a world that I thought only existed in legends and myths. It was so... breathtaking! From that moment on, I knew Hiccup wasn't some whiny, useless nobody. He had something worth saying. Something worth listening to."

"After battling the Red Death and watching his limp body being cradled by Stoick, I had never felt so... empty. I think that's when I realized how much of an impact he had had on me. The idea of losing him was unbearable. Not when we had started something so special. When he finally woke up, I may have ended up kissing him in front of the whole village. And things were kind of awkward at first. We were both new to the whole relationship thing. I knew that there was something there though. I got butterflies around him a lot and would get really mad at myself for it."

"Still, my heart got the better of me and after years of being with him, I can definitely say I love him. More than anything. And I know he loves me too. He's definitely made me into a much sappier person because of it."

Valka had a huge grin on her face and sighed, "To be young and in love. There's nothing like it. My mother always teased me and Stoick about each other until one day, we just ended up together! Then she started pestering us about marriage. Oh, and grandchildren!"

"Wow there, let's not rush too far ahead," the two ladies heard from behind.

Hiccup was leaning on a banister near the kitchen, smirking amusedly.

Astrid jumped up and pulled Hiccup over to sit with them.

"When did you sneak down here?" she asked as she sat sideways on Hiccup's lap, extending her legs over the arm of the chair.

"Around the time my girlfriend said she loved me and my mother brought up grandkids," he replied, hugging Astrid by the waist and kissing her cheek.

Astrid wrapped her arms around his side and snuggled close while Hiccup talked to Valka about the parts she had skipped over in their story. She laughed, and blushed, and laughed some more as Hiccup did impressions and that thing with his shoulders and hands.

By the end of the night, Valka was exhausted. A good exhausted.

"I think it's time for me to catch some shut eye," she said as she stood up and stretched her limbs. Hiccup scooped up Astrid and swayed her around, causing a giggle fit to ensue. When he put her down, Valka gave them both a hug good night and then retired to her bedroom feeling refreshed and excited for the future. She knew she'd have plenty of stories to tell her grandchildren one day.

In the other room, Hiccup grabbed Astrid's hand and guided her toward the door.

"Would you like me to walk you home?"

"Yes," she smiled, kissing his cheek.

The journey was relatively silent. Astrid swayed their interlocked hands back in forth as they walked along the path that led to her hut.

Hiccup felt young and in love as he sneaked a peek at the woman beside him. It had been five years and he still felt butterflies every time he looked at her. She was so supportive, and stubborn, and GODS was she beautiful. She was everything he ever needed.

She noticed his stare and bit her lip, "Something on my face?"

"Yep," he said as they reached her doorstep, "Two beautiful eyes, one adorable nose, and lips as soft as-"

She quieted him with a soft kiss.

"You know you just interrupted what was going to be the most romantic monologue of all time," he joked.

"Sorry, I just couldn't help myself."

"Let me ease your urges," he said as he leaned down and kissed her hard. The feel of her lips sent shivers down his spine as he snaked an arm around her waist and pulled her closer. Their lips glided across each other with a familiar rhythm as Astrid deepened the kiss with a sigh. She rested her hands on his head and combed her fingers through his soft truces, causing him to moan softly at the gentle ministrations. She halted when she noticed something missing.

"Excuse me sir, what happened to your braids?"

Uh-oh.

"Um- t-the wind probably set them loose or something. Y'know how fast Toothless and I fly," he replied, leaning in to continue their kiss and distract her. She was too quick though and stopped his lips with her hand.

"Hmm, are you sure? Cause if I remember correctly, I put them in this morning and you haven't flown Toothless at all today."

He paused and put his hands behind his back trying to think of another excuse. He could tell by Astrid's face that she was highly amused.

"Why don't you come inside and let me re-braid what the 'wind' destroyed."

"Only if you'll let me undo yours," he said gently tugging the end of her side-braid. He still couldn't get over how beautiful she looked when her hair was wild and untamed.

"Sounds good to me."

The two lovers snuck upstairs and spent the rest of the night braiding, un-braiding, and whispering merrily. Astrid brought up the parts of her conversation with Valka that Hiccup had missed from earlier. They reflected upon all the changes and remembered how things used to be. Yes, life as a teenager had been much more carefree and blithe. But growing up had brought an intimacy between the two that was indestructible.

As they cuddled and kissed and dozed off to sleep, Astrid felt certain about one thing. No matter how numerous and great their stories were, nothing compared to living in the moment with each other.

* * *

><p>Hope you enjoyed! Feel free to favorite, follow, and review!

5. Decisions

Again, you guys are awesome and make me smile! :3 I was eating a donut earlier and started smiling and the lady behind the counter thought I was just REALLY enjoying that donut but NOPE. I was thinking of you all! Okay, enough about me being a loser. Behold, the next chapter!

Disclaimer: I do not own How to Train Your Dragon!

* * *

><p>The obscured flying form could be seen approaching rapidly on the horizon. Astrid noticed it first, as she dropped the black sheep into its bin and won yet another Dragon Race. The crowd was cheering for their favorite champion but she paid little attention to it. Something about the soaring creature's bearing showed a hint of urgency.<p>

Hiccup landed Toothless on the resting platform and began to clap Astrid's way. He noticed her distracted state, and followed her gaze to what he was sure was a dragon. In fact, it looked like a messenger dragon. That was never good.

"Come on, bud. Let's go see what's wrong," he said, patting Toothless' head.

As they approached the green Terrible Terror, Hiccup spotted a minuscule scroll attached to its leg. The poor dragon looked exhausted, landing on Toothless in midair with a hefty puff. Hiccup carefully unrolled the message and scanned the messy script.

_As our most trusted and reliable ally, we plead that the Hooligan tribe send aid forth at once. A horrendous fleet of pirates have ambushed the island of Bashem and are proceeding to destroy everything and everyone in their wake. _

_ - Bashem-Oiks tribe _

Hiccup felt apprehension consume him as he commanded Toothless to fly back toward the crowd at the Dragon Racing arena. This was it. His

first big calling as chief. The judgments he made in the upcoming hours would determine the life or death of his tribe and the one they were going to help defend. The stakes were high.

As he flew in front of the assembly, he waved his arms in a swift motion to silence them. The dragon racers landed their dragons and looked at Hiccup with curiosity and concern.

"Everyone gather in the Great Hall immediately!"

An uneasy tension filled the crowd as they hurried over. Astrid saw the determined grimace on Hiccup's face as he zoomed away, a note clutched in his hand.

When everyone was gathered together, Hiccup stood up on his pedestal. The quiet murmur grew mute as Hiccup surveyed the crowd with an authoritative disposition.

"Pirates have attacked our neighbors, the Bashem-Oiks tribe. They've sent an appeal and I as chief have chosen to act upon it. Dragon riders, prepare your dragons for a long journey ahead. Sailors, ready the ships with as many defensive weapons as you can. I will need a small group of either five or six to stay behind with the children and elders. I appoint Astrid Hofferson as the acting chief while I am away. Don't delay. We leave immediately!"

Astrid couldn't believe what she was hearing. She was NOT going to wait around while the rest of the tribe was off fighting. She tried to maneuver her way through the current of people to talk some sense into Hiccup. Much to her displeasure, he rushed off in the other direction with Toothless and the other dragon riders in tow.

She eventually caught up with them in the stables loading food, water, and weapons to the saddles of their dragons.

"Hiccup, are you out of your mind?!" she confronted him angrily, "I'm not gonna just stay behind while you all ride off to battle!"

"Astrid, I've made my decision."

"Well, maybe I don't wanna listen!"

The other dragon riders felt ill at ease as they tried to act like they couldn't hear the argument unfolding in front of them.

"Astrid, please don't make things more difficult."

"More difficult?! Hiccup! You need me out there!"

"No, I need you here!"

"You are being SO ridiculous!"

"ASTRID!" he yelled, grabbing her rigid shoulders, "I NEED you to do this! Gods forbid, if something happens to me today, you're the only one I would trust to take over in my place! I don't doubt your ability as a warrior, in fact, you're probably ten times more worthy than I am! But I need you to trust my decision! I'm doing it for the greater good of Berk!"

Astrid felt her clenched fists loosen as she looked into his distressed eyes. The hands on her shoulders shook ever so slightly and she felt anxiety rippling through them both. She was still angry with his decision but she saw little point in arguing now. It was clear he had made up his mind. She eased his hands down curtly before nodding her head in agreement.

He backed away distraught and continued with his preparations. The other dragon riders began moving around again, making the awkward silence from before much more apparent.

Astrid left soon after feeling agitated and rattled at the circumstances of things. She didn't want to agree, but she knew Hiccup's reasoning was sound. She tried to distract herself by helping load equipment onto the ships but nothing seemed to calm her edge.

She loaded the last catapult and then stood on the docks, waiting for their departure. She saw Hiccup and the others fly overhead and felt a longing to be up there beside them. She knew there was little she could do to change things now though.

Astrid remained there long after the last ships could be seen dipping over the skyline. It reminded her of that time five years ago when the ships had sailed off to the Nest and left Hiccup behind. She waited for someone to come console her but felt foolish standing around in discontent. She needed to fulfill her duty, no matter how much she resented it.

* * *

><p>The journey to Bashem was proving to be a tiresome one. Hiccup couldn't keep his mind off of their argument. He had known she would be upset with his decision, no matter how reasonable it seemed to him. He was being totally honest with her though. If something ever did happen to him, Astrid was the only one he fully trusted to take over in his place. He need her safe for that reason. She was quick, decisive, and strong. Everything a chief needed to be. He only hoped he would be the same as he led his people off to the aid of the Bashem-Oiks.<p>

Valka pulled up beside him, a look of concern etched across her face. She had witnessed the argument from earlier and could see that it was still troubling the young chief.

"Ifâ€¦ if it would help, maybe next time I could stand-in for you instead."

"Mom, we need you here. To lead the dragons that don't have riders."

She knew that he was right but it still didn't make her feel any better.

Hiccup noticed her troubled expression and put on a strained grin to ease her nerves.

From the ships below, Hiccup heard a bellow.

"Land ahoy!"

He took a deep breath and flew Toothless forward to the lead the entourage on.

_You can do this. _

As he neared the island, he saw smoke rising and fire devouring the village. Burnt plywood coated the shore as it drifted out toward the vast nothingness. But something was amiss.

There were no screams. There were no cries. There were no pirates.

Hiccup felt his heart beat rise as he landed in the eerie scene. Rubble and ash coated the streets in such a thick layer that he left an imprint with each step he took. The smell of burning wood was so putrid he felt like puking, and the lack of life made everything even more off putting.

He made his way to the center of town where the chief's quarters resided. Of all the buildings in the village, this one had remained the most in tact. He kicked the door open and peered into the darkness. He noticed a candle placed on the floor in front of him with a match conveniently resting on the right. Almost too conveniently.

Suspicious and intrigued, he lit the candle and illuminated the room. The entrance opened to a den and kitchen, much like Hiccup's own home. Grey curtains covered the windows, making the room appear smaller than it actually was. At the center of the chamber, there sat a lone stool carved from dark birch wood.

As Hiccup trekked over, he spotted a piece of parchment lying on the seat of the stool. He grabbed it hastily and read the contents.

He dropped it with a jolt.

With great haste, Hiccup ran outside and yelled for Toothless who flew to his side immediately. He urgently ordered the Vikings to turn back at once and then shot off in the direction they had come from, the legion following close behind.

They left the island of Bashem as it deteriorated into nothingness. The fires burned out. The smoke banished out the sun. But the lone candle resting in the late chief's quarters burned on, illuminating the note that read:

_Berk is next. _

* * *

><p>DUN, DUN, DUNNNNN! Hope you enjoyed :D Feel free to review, favorite, or follow!

6. Consequences

**I'm back! Sorry for the short absence. I moved this weekend, so my WiFi was down until this afternoon. Anyway, thank you to all the new

favorites, follows, and reviews! You all are AH-MAZING! Enjoy!
:)*

**Disclaimer: I do not own How to Train Your Dragon! **

* * *

><p>Astrid was lounging in Hiccup's chair when she heard the blasts. There was a haunting silence before the ground began to shake, accompanied by a piercing scream. She sprinted to the door as cries of distress and explosions enveloped the air. As she stood in the landing, she saw a cannon ball heading straight in her direction and quickly dived behind the barrier of Hiccup's kitchen counter. She felt the sprinkle of wood on her head as the cannon ball ruptured the floor of the entry way and sent splinters flying everywhere.<p>

Her battle instincts switched on as she hurried up to Hiccup's room and grabbed his spare shield and fire sword. Much to her misfortune, the ground began to quake as she descended the stairs. Astrid soon lost her footing and was sent tumbling down. She felt small sharp splinters pierce her right side as she landed with a painful thud. She shoved the discomfort aside though.

She was needed outside.

Astrid followed the source of the screams to a small cottage that had collapsed into itself. Inside, the children were crying and coughing for air.

"HELP! THEY'RE SUFFOCATING! HURRY!" Astrid screamed as she began digging through the piles of wood and tossing them to the side.

More people joined her as they frantically rummaged through the destruction, the children's cries growing louder as the layers thinned. They reached them seconds later, huddled under a table that had protected them from the collapsed roof.

Thank gods.

"I need three people to escort the children into the woods. Hide in the Cove and stay completely out of sight!" Astrid ordered, "The rest of you, go to the Armory and grab a shield and a sword. I'll be at the stables preparing the baby dragons to help with our defense."

The group disbanded and prepared for a fight, keeping an eye to the sky as cannonballs rained down aimlessly. On the way to the stables, Astrid spotted an armada of ships nearing the docks and felt her heart sink into her stomach.

They were extremely outnumbered.

Berk was doomed.

* * *

><p>As Toothless flew faster than lightning, Hiccup's mind raced at the same speed. He couldn't believe what he had done. The island was defenseless, save for the six capable vikings that had stayed behind. The Armory was out of quality weapons and the only dragons that they

had to assist them were relatively untrained babies.<p>

The minute Toothless had lifted off, the rest of the dragon riders had followed right at his tail. They had left the ships behind knowing that their journey would be much longer, even if they were travelling at the highest speed. Time was essential now, and they couldn't have anything holding them back.

Berk would be as good as gone if they didn't get there soon. Hiccup dreaded the thought that they might already be too late.

What if the pirates had attacked the minute they were gone? What if he arrived at Berk and the village was destroyed? What if Astrid was...

No! He didn't even want to consider that possibility. Not after how they had left things with each other.

He felt a lump growing in his throat as he thought about their argument again. How angry she had been. How the possibility that the last thing he would ever say to her wasn't that he loved her. His mind sent scenarios through his head of arriving at the village and finding her beautiful body mangled and lifeless. He tried to shove the thoughts out but it was all that he could see. Every blink was a reminder that he had failed her.

"Hurry, Toothless," he whispered, resting his head on the front of the saddle in exasperation. The dragon whimpered in sympathy and tried his hardest to get his best friend home quicker. He didn't want Hiccup to lose another person he loved. Not again.

* * *

><p>"Get the saddles loaded with as many weapons as possible," Astrid commanded as she sprinted this way and that, preparing for the oncoming attack. She peered out and watched as the first ship docked along the shore. A large band of pirates scrambled out and scurried up toward the village.<p>

"Everyone mount your dragons! They're coming."

The group waited in silence as the sound of yelling grew closer. Astrid closed her eyes and pictured Hiccup. She found comfort in the memories. Their first kiss. Their many dates. The first time they made love. It all came flooding back as she awaited what was certain to be her final fight.

The sound of hammering feet came to a halt at the closed entrance to the dragon stable. Astrid heard the swish of an ax as it hammered through the barricade. With one final swipe, the entrance was open and the vikings' began their fight with death.

* * *

><p>Her smell, her face, her shaky breath. The hands that caressed his bare-skinned back. Kisses, and skin, and quiet moans. The love that bonded them into one.<p>

Hiccup felt shaken as he jumped awake. His forehead laid on the front of Toothless' saddle, a cold sweat breaking through it. He sat up and

observed his surroundings but could only see the washed out whiteness of the clouds that flew by.

His body was on edge. It was as if he was vibrating from the overload of stress and worry. He was a sizzling fireball that could never explode. The dream that at one time would have left Hiccup feeling content and relaxed was now a guilt-inducing nightmare.

He heard the flap of wings from behind, and saw Valka and Gobber in close pursuit. They gave Hiccup a hopeful look but behind their eyes all he could see was pity.

Hiccup wanted none of it.

Soon, they were flying past enormous boulders that marked their entry into the Isles of Berk. The fog obscured any sight of the island but Hiccup knew they were close.

The cannonballs that flew past him confirmed that. From below, Hiccup could see a fleet of ships firing their weapons ruthlessly. There were five, each with a human capacity of approximately twenty, that were docked at Berk's shore. The ships were relatively empty which meant that a majority of the pirates had already made landfall. His assumptions were through and through, as the smell of burning reached them and Berk came into view, aflame.

Toothless effortlessly dodged the cannonballs and hovered over the smoking village. Hiccup and him scanned the streets for movement but each lane was empty. From his aerial view, all he could see were flames and smoke consuming the buildings. Except for his house.

"Down there, bud!" he shouted, veering Toothless toward his home. At the moment, it looked more like a prison.

When Toothless made landfall, Hiccup jumped off of him and sprinted toward the front door. He slammed it open and almost tripped over a hole in the floor where a cannonball had plunged through the pinewood boards.

His heart stopped. Across the room, Hiccup saw Astrid lying on his chair, unconscious. All his rational thoughts disappeared as he saw the cuts that lined her right profile. He bolted toward her, scooping her up in his arms and putting an ear to her chest.

Words can't describe the terror of listening for a heartbeat. Leaning down and waiting. Knowing that the outcome can only end two ways. The anticipation was insufferable.

Then, he heard it. The strong thump booming underneath her chest.

Relief flooded through him as tears brimmed his eyes. He felt her shake underneath his tight clutch and looked down to see two beautiful blue eyes opening slowly. He watched as she examined her surroundings but grew confused when she bolted upright.

"Hiccup, it's a trap!" she yelled frantically.

Unfortunately, it was too late as he felt three burly men pummel him

to the ground. They bound him and Astrid with shackles and yanked them outside by a chain. Hiccup saw Toothless struggling against a thick iron harness that encompassed his entire body, while pirates poked and prodded him. Hiccup was halted as they dragged Astrid ahead of him onto the dock. He could see the dragon riders attacking the ships from where he stood, unaware of the dilemma he and Astrid were in.

When Astrid reached the docks, one of the men hurried over to the horn that was usually used to warn dragon racers that the black sheep had been released. This man had much darker intentions.

As the horn sounded, one of the men by Astrid pushed her up against a beam and chained her to it. This caught the attention of the dragon riders who stopped in midair. Behind Hiccup, a tall woman walked forward. She was dressed in a sophisticated blue uniform, her short brown hair neatly parted on the side. She looked to be about Hiccup's age and held the composure of a self-assured leader. She stopped before the dragon riders and looked at them with an uptight glare.

"Hello, Hooligan tribe. I am Captain Hallerna of the Sullen Sea and I command you all to stand down at once! I'm sure you are thinking at this precise moment what power I have over you that would make you stand down, no? Well, let's just say I am a VERY good shot."

She motioned to the man on her left who handed her a bow and arrow. With a well-trained ease, Hallerna fastened the nock of the arrow to her bow's string, and looked Astrid's direction. From several feet away, Astrid watched as the captain smiled maliciously and aimed the arrow straight at Astrid's face.

She heard the sound of Hiccup screaming but dared not look in his direction. Moments passed as Hallerna made her spectators writhe in suspense. And then, snap.

Astrid closed her eyes and waited for the arrow as it approached. She felt the world moving in slow motion around her and kept her mind on images of Hiccup as she waited for death. But it never came.

Instead, she jumped as she heard a loud thud above her head. She peered up to see an arrow piercing the wood an inch above her. She looked back at Hallerna who was smirking wickedly as she turned back toward the Vikings flying overhead.

"If I see one dragon fly across the sky or one viking step foot onto this island, I can assure you that Ms. Hofferson and your dearest chief will both have an arrow straight through their face. Now leave, before I decide to give this lass another shot as target practice!"

The dragon riders backed off hesitantly. Stormfly was whining as Valka blocked her from going toward Astrid. Valka felt dreadful as she led the group away from Berk, all her hope of saving the island lost. Her worst nightmare was coming true as the distance grew between her and her son. Was this fate's cruel punishment? Killing everyone she loved as retribution for leaving her family?

After a while, she saw the Hooligan tribe's ships sailing in the

direction the dragons had raced ahead to. She tried to formulate sentences that would best describe their situation without causing a panic. The only word that came to her mind in the end was "Hopeless."

The situation was hopeless.

* * *

><p>Back on Berk, Hiccup and Astrid were being dragged to the dungeon. As they passed by cells, Hiccup saw the other Vikings that had stayed behind, chained to the walls. Any hope of escape left their minds as they saw Hiccup and Astrid being lugged to their own cell.<p>

When they reached the end of the hallway, they were met with the last empty lockup. They were tossed inside and chained to the wall like the others. The minute the pirates were gone, Hiccup scurried to where Astrid sat and held her tightly. His heavy breath tickled the crook of her neck as he hugged her for what felt like hours.

She gently combed her fingers through his hair and closed her eyes, revelling in the feel of what she almost lost. He slowly shifted and put his forehead to hers, sliding his hands down her arms to the fingers that he interlaced with his own. By now, there chains and shackles were a tangled mess but neither cared as long as it kept them close together.

"I'm so sorry," Hiccup said through closed eyes, "I don't know what I was thinking. I mean what if-"

Astrid didn't let him finish his thought as she grabbed his face and pulled him in for a passionate kiss. They were never close enough as they pulled each other into a tight embrace once again. The fire behind each kiss grew deeper as she felt Hiccup push her up against the cell wall and ravage every inch of her exposed skin. When he reached her neck, she felt him stop, causing her to whimper in discontent.

He backed away slightly and examined the cuts that lined the right side of her neck. He traced the outline of each laceration with sad eyes, and followed them upward and downward over the rest of her scraped up body. Then, he leaned into her neck and graced soft kisses along each mark. He took his time, mending each moment of pain she experienced with a chill-inducing kiss until he reached her mouth.

"I love you," he whispered against her parted lips, before he kissed her softly one last time.

She pulled away and cupped his cheeks with her small hands, "I love you."

They disentangled themselves from their chains and then sat next to each other against the wall. He grabbed her hand and put it in his lap, playing with it absent-mindedly.

"So, what happened?"

"Well, once you guys left I tried to find something to help pass

the time. In the end, there was nothing to do so I went to your house and rested in your chair. Probably about an hour passed before I heard and felt the explosions from the cannonballs. I sent the children to hide in the Cove and they still haven't found them yet. It'll only be a matter of time though. The rest of us prepared to fight in the stables, and we were actually able to defend ourselves for awhile. I mean, those baby dragons pack a mean punch! But they cowered away the minute Hallerna walked into the room. By then, the vikings and dragons who were fighting had been captured, but no one went after me. They all cleared away from the center of the stable and formed a ring around me and Hallerna instead. She pulled out a sword and challenged me to a duel. She said she'd leave if I won. I agreed, thinking I had the upper hand with your spare fire sword and all. But it turns out she had one too."

"She was a master at it. Her control of the blade. I just I tried to put up a good fight but it became useless. It went on for a long time and she never seemed to tire down. As I grew more exhausted, she grew more persistent. Eventually, she disarmed me and knocked me out with a blow to the head. The next thing I remember was waking up with you kneeling over me."

"Astrid, I'm I'm so sorry," he said, dropping his forehead on her shoulder.

"For what? Sending the people of Berk to go help a tribe in need? Hiccup, you didn't know that it was too late for them. You didn't know that pirates were waiting to attack us. No matter what you think, you left this island with the right intentions. You set out to do the right thing."

"And look where that got us."

Astrid slipped her hand from his grip, stood up and crossed her arms sternly, "Listen here, Hiccup! This self-loathing isn't going to do us any good. The past is in the past and we need to look towards the future, AKA a way to get out of here. You're an amazing chief and it's time to put your skills to the test. Together, we can do this! Together, I'd like to see them try and stop us!"

He looked up at her loving and strong expression. He apprehensively nodded his head and wondered how he had landed someone as amazing as her. She always believed in him, always trusted him, and ALWAYS urged him onward. He stood up and gave her a kiss as he felt his spirits rise dramatically. If they were together, nothing could hold them back.

They were interrupted by a cough. They turned to the cell door to see Hallerna leaning lazily on the caged wall.

"If you keep up this kissing thing, I might just have to separate you two," Hallerna threatened in a sing-song voice.

"What do you want from us?" Astrid said as she stood forth defiantly.

"Well, you two are quite the bargaining chip. Why wouldn't I want that? I've never seen a tribe so dedicated to protecting their chief and his dearly beloved from my fine arrow's point. I mean, they gave up their home for you two. I'd feel quite fortunate if I were

you."

"What's so great about Berk that you couldn't find elsewhere?! Why not find a home of your own instead of stealing one?!"

"Because Berk is a necessary part of my plan," Hallerna remarked as she began to pace back and forth, "Just like Bashem, but for different purposes. While the land there was nice, the Bashem-Oiks tribe was rather pitiful. They could barely put up a fight which made the place seem less appealing by the end. But I put it to good use as a means of distraction."

When Hallerna turned her back, Hiccup glanced at Astrid who was looking at him out of the corner of her eye. She winked, reassuring him of something. He wasn't sure what yet.

Then, Astrid put on her most threatening expression and stood up to her fullest height, "So you destroyed Bashem, sent a fake plea to us, got all the Vikings out of Berk, and THEN felt safe enough to attack? I'm not so sure the Bashem-Oiks are the pitiful ones here."

Hallerna squinted her eyes and sighed deeply. She pulled out her keys, unlocked the cell door and stepped up close to Astrid.

"You just love to poke the bear with a stick, don't you? It seems to me that Ms. Hofferson's still upset over the fact that I beat her in a little duel earlier. Maybe a nice walk outside will cool her down," she said condescendingly. Hallerna quickly unlocked Astrid's chains and pulled her in the direction of the cell door. Hiccup was surprised to see Astrid put up no fight as she was guided outside and away from the safety of isolation.

Hiccup hoped that Astrid had sound reasoning behind her taunting but had little idea of what that could possibly do to get them out of here.

After all, escape was crucial if they were to ever call Berk their home again.

* * *

><p>Again, thank you all so much for reading! I hope this new conflict keeps you intrigued. I'm having a lot fun writing Hallerna! Don't forget to review, favorite, or follow! :) And in case I don't update tomorrow, Happy Canada Day!

7. Eternity

Oh my goodness, I'm exhausted. I hope that's not apparent in my writing today! We had a pretty big barbecue for Canada Day yesterday and I'm still trying to regain my energy from such a tiring evening. Today, I finally got Hulu Plus and binged on season 6 of Park and Recreation which made me even more sleepy but who cares! It was worth it for Chris Pratt and Leslie/Ben! Okay enough about me. Thank you for all the new favorites, follows, and reviews! I can't believe I'm over 100 on my follow count now! You guys are awesome! I hope you enjoy. :D

Disclaimer: I do not own How to Train Your Dragon!

* * *

><p>The chains that bound Hiccup's hands were clattering across the stone floor, emitting an irritating noise that was driving everyone in the dungeon mad. He had been pacing for hours now, worried sick about Astrid's long absence since she had been taken away that afternoon. Night had fallen and the longer she had been gone, the further away she felt from him.<p>

Today was a disaster. So much had happened that it felt like an eternity had gone by in the process. The morning had started out perfectly, with a nice awakening from Toothless who was eager for his first morning flight in weeks. They had excitedly practiced tricks for the Dragon Race that would be later that morning, and had spent the remainder of their time in the tranquil wind and limitless blue sky.

Now, he was here. A prisoner in his own land. The idea of freedom sounded far-fetched and impossible. After all, Hallerna had imposed the most powerful weapon you can upon conquered people. Fear.

Fear of death. Fear of loss. Fear of hope.

For Hiccup, it was fear of time. As the Moon rose, time ticked by and the uncertainty of Astrid's fate was becoming even more abstract.

What could possibly be keeping her this long?

The clank of a door opening, followed by deep murmurs and footsteps, answered his question. Two burly pirates, one in front and one behind, guided Astrid back to her cell. Hiccup hurried to the bars and examined Astrid's physique.

Nothing seemed wrong on the outside but Hiccup could tell she was shielding something behind her stoic expression. She was roughly tossed in the cell but was caught by a fast-moving Hiccup. She quickly steadied herself and sat down where they had been earlier.

"So, what was that all about?" he asked as he slumped down next to her.

"Well, you'll be happy to hear that I know how we're gonna get out of here!"

"How?!"

"Well... let's just say one of us might have to challenge Hallerna to a fight to the death."

"Please tell me you're joking," he said as he rubbed his face in exasperation.

"Trust me, this plan is foolproof!" she replied, scooting close to Hiccup and putting her mouth to his ear, "We need to whisper, she has ears listening everywhere. Now, as I was saying, if there is one thing Hallerna is afraid of, it's losing the fear that she's induced in the people. If you try and undermine her abilities, as you can

tell from earlier, she's going to make sure you know your place-"

"Wait, what did she do to you?"

"Um, nothing. Don't worry. Anyway, while I was out there today, I checked the guard count for the dungeon entrance. There are only two of them, and they switch out everyday at sunset. The fresh set of guards take the cell key from the last set and place it in a pocket in their jacket. Better yet, they also bring our food for the day at that time! So one of us needs to pick-pocket the key from whoever brings us our food. And that's how all of us are gonna get out of the dungeon!"

"Astrid, I don't know if that's entirely foolproof-"

"I'm not done yet!" she said as she jabbed his arm impatiently, "Now, I understand that escaping the dungeon is only part of the plan. And probably the easiest part considering what comes next-"

"Wait, didn't you say one of us has to duel Hallern-"

"Did you develop this insistent desire to interrupt people while I was gone?"

"Oh right, sorry."

"Okay, so while one of us pick-pockets the key, the other has to be outside dueling Hallerna. They're gonna be the distraction this entire time. When we unlock the cell doors for everyone else in here, we'll have to detain the two guards and lock them up. They should be the only two on duty in this area because the rest of the pirates will be watching the fight."

"While they're watching the fight, we'll sneak around to the entrance of the stables where they're keeping the dragons. There'll be guards there as well but we'll outnumber them by at least ten. When we get to the dragons, one of us will grab Toothless while the other escapees fly the baby dragons to rescue the kids in the Cove. Toothless will help us save the person who's battling Hallerna, and then, we'll be out of there! We'll go search for the rest of the tribe and lead them back to Berk. Hallerna will have nothing to use against us and her surrender should come pretty soon after!"

Hiccup nodded his head as he processed the information. The plan wasn't bad. It wasn't entirely to his liking though. One of them would have to battle Hallerna and that was a risky feat within itself. There were so many variables that were undetermined. Also, if something went wrong, they didn't have a back-up plan.

He peered at Astrid who was eagerly waiting for a reply. It was obvious that it was their only option at the moment, so he didn't see why not. While death was very likely out there, it was one hundred percent certain in here. Just delayed a little bit longer.

He smiled, feeling bold and audacious.

"Let's do it."

Astrid's face lit up as her hope returned. She swooped in and gave

Hiccup a quick peck on the lips. He wanted more though and grabbed her waist, moving his hands up and across her back gently as he deepened the kiss. He suddenly felt her jolt from underneath his touch as she let out a shriek of pain and scooted away.

"Astrid, what's wrong?!"

"I-It's nothing. I'm fine."

"You obviously aren't," he said as he scooted closer and outstretched his hand.

She only turned her back and shoed him away.

"Astridâ€|"

The desperation was apparent in his voice. She knew that her absence had troubled him, especially under the circumstances that they were in. The last thing she wanted was for him to be more stressed than he already was. But she didn't want him to see. She didn't want him to know what she had been through.

She hesitantly turned her face to look back at his concerned expression. She took several deep breaths to calm herself before she raised her hand to take off her shoulder armor and hood. She slowly removed her red top and revealed the gash on her upper back. She heard Hiccup gasp and frantically scuttle close behind her.

"Who did this?!"

Astrid heard an unfamiliar ferocity in his tone. She felt his fingers gently skim her back but could feel an angry tension within each stroke.

"H-... Hallerna," she replied, putting her face in her hands, "She did it in front of the whole fleet. She made me stand there for hours as they laughed at me."

Hiccup felt a fuse switch off inside him. All the anger, stress and worry had finally reached it's breaking point and he was boiling with a rage he didn't think he was capable of.

"Does Hallerna expect me to just sit here while she tortures you and deprives my people of their home!? Aghh! Tomorrow, we're going to get out of here and I'm going to make sure she never steps foot on this island, or any other island, EVER again!"

"Hiccup-"

"I'll be the one to duel her tomorrow, and she is going to regret it the minute I step in! I'll make sure she feels the pain she put you through-"

"HICCUP!"

"What?!"

He now realized that he was standing up and yelling loudly. He focused back in and saw Astrid holding his face, trying to calm him down rather unsuccessfully.

"Just breathe, babe. I need you to calm down or they're gonna come in here. Breathe with me."

He felt foolish but did as she said. She slowly seated him and sat in his lap, putting her forehead to his as they respired together. He rested his hands on the exposed skin of her lower back and ran his hands up and down the smooth surface.

"Hiccup, you need to know that Hallerna's just trying to work you up. She wants you to consume yourself with fury and be the opposite of who you are. But you need to be the Hiccup that doesn't give into that anger. The Hiccup that uses his amazing brain to come up with ideas that bring joy into this world, rather than hate. Be the Hiccup that I love more than anything."

He sighed, letting out the pressure that was welled up inside him. He nodded his head, kissing her gently as a promise.

After a moment of comforting serenity, he turned her around in his lap and looked back at the mark Hallerna had left. He wished he could consume Astrid's pain and rid her of the memories that came along with it. That type of mending was impossible though. He would have to try a more traditional method.

Astrid heard a tear from behind and glanced back to see Hiccup ripping off a piece of his green undershirt. She felt him wrap the tattered cloth snugly over her wound. When he finished, he traced the bandage with gentle kisses and felt her shiver from each touch.

"I love you," he whispered against her neck.

"I love you too," she replied as she guided him to the ground to lay with her. She faced her back to the cell door while Hiccup spooned her from behind, acting as her blanket for the night.

She felt him kiss the back of her hair softly and tighten his grip around her. She put her hand over his and squeezed it gently before closing her eyes and drifting off to a dreamless sleep.

Today had been an eternity and their problems were piling up by the second. While there was hope on the horizon, there was uncertainty chasing them close behind. The unavoidable questions of fate that loomed over their heads would soon be faced. But for tonight, they would enjoy their short moment of calm before a whole new storm.

* * *

><p>I think I'll do the same as Hiccup and Astrid, and catch some much needed shut eye! You all are amazing and I hope you enjoyed! The next chapter will probably be pretty long so it might be a couple of days before I update. We'll see! Don't forget to favorite, follow, and review! :)

8. Uncertainty

**I'm back! So sorry for the wait. When I'm not busy and should be writing, I always find myself on Tumblr instead. It took another viewing of HTTYD2 to get me back on to Word but it was definitely

worth it. (3rd times the charm, maybe?) Thanks for sticking through the wait, and I hope you enjoy! **

Disclaimer: I do not own How to Train Your Dragon!

* * *

><p>Hiccup's bedroom was hazy as he opened his eyes. He sat up and looked down to his left to see Astrid lying sprawled out across her side of the bed. After throwing some covers over her, Hiccup walked up to Toothless and outstretched his hand to pet him gently. He halted when he heard the deep laughter coming from downstairs.<p>

Sloppily, he threw a shirt on before journeying down toward the source of giggles and amusement. He was shocked as he cast his eyes upon his mother and father making breakfast. They didn't seem to notice him as they moved around the kitchen and talked nonchalantly. They had a rhythm as they strolled about, each step perfectly choreographed from years of the same routine.

Valka soon saw Hiccup observing them from afar and giggled joyously. Scurrying over to Stoick, she graced a kiss to his cheek, and then waved goodbye to Hiccup as she went outside. Hiccup was slightly puzzled by her strange departure but his father walking toward him made all his rattled thoughts disappear.

Stoick patted his back and laughed joyously, "How's the Pride of Berk been?"

"D-dad? Wha- what areâ€¦| What are you doing here?"

Stoick continued to chuckle at his son's bewildered expression and gestured over to their arm chairs, "Why don't we sit down and have a nice chat?"

The two sat in silence for quite some time. Hiccup was fidgeting and staring at his Dad in awe while Stoick was nodding his head and smiling proudly at his son. The scene would've made anyone watching tumble over with laughter.

The mood suddenly changed when Stoick cleared his throat, sat up straight and put on his customary domineering scowl, "So, you're in a dilemma."

Hiccup bowed his head embarrassedly, barely able to contain the immense feelings of guilt coursing through him.

"A dilemma is putting it very nicely. Nope, I screwed up big time."

"Son," Stoick began, leaving a pause in the air as he tried to formulate his thoughts into words. This certainly wasn't his area.

"I'mâ€¦| I'm sorry. I'm sorry that I had to leave without a proper goodbye. And that I left you with a responsibility you said you weren't ready for. And... that these past few months have been some of the toughest of your life. To go back even further, I'm sorry thatâ€¦| I-I'm sorry that you had to fire that first flaming arrow

onto my ship. I know that it was one of the hardest things you ever had to do. To let go and then step up and lead your people."

"But if there's one thing I know about you, Hiccup, it's that you can overcome any obstacle. You were born with the gifts of stubbornness and persistence. Of curiosity and a need for something greater. If there is anyone who can save Berk countless times and only come out with some scratches and a missing limb, it's my son."

Like before, Hiccup was speechless. But a different kind of speechless. The goodbye Hiccup had so often longed for was now being presented to him and he couldn't utter a single word in response.

Stoick rubbed the back of his head, "Ehm, yeah I know that's probably not what you wanted to hear--"

He was cut off as Hiccup jumped up and embraced him tightly.

"I love you, Dad."

"I love you too, son."

They let the words linger for quite sometime before Hiccup broke the hug and stared at his father quizzically, "I-Is this normal? Should I be expecting visits from you every time I screw up?"

Stoick chuckled, "If you need me, Hiccup, I will never be far away. But it seems that Astrid is pretty good at this whole pep talk thing as well, so I might listen to her every once in a while."

"Do you think we should follow through with her plan?"

"I think you should do what you do best. Save Berk. Her plan is a nice start."

Once again, the world was becoming a blur around them as Hiccup felt a distance growing between him and Stoick. Panic clutched his heart as his father nodded his head and smiled one last time.

"Goodbye for now, Hiccup."

"Dad- wait!"

Hiccup jolted awake, heaving for air. He felt as if the world was spinning, and tried to steady his turbulent head. Within seconds, Astrid was sitting up in front of him with concern etched across her face. She cautiously placed her hands on his cheeks, not wanting to disturb him in his distressed state but also trying to act as his anchor back into reality.

"Hiccup, why don't you lay back down."

He nodded, his head still in the clouds, as Astrid guided him down. She laid next to him and propped her head up on her hand, studying his tense face as he stared at the ceiling. She placed her hand on his chest and drew amorphous shapes across it to soothe him. When his breathing steadied, he looked up at her solemnly.

"I saw him. Dad. I guess he was trying to reassure me about today,"

he closed his eyes, pain straining his features, "H-he said goodbye. And that he loved me."

When he opened his eyes, Astrid could see unshed tears waiting to trickle out. As usual, Hiccup held them back, breathing deeply to help ease the tightness of his throat. Astrid laid her head in the crook of his neck and let him recover wordlessly.

At least half an hour passed before their silence was disturbed by the dungeon doors opening. Footsteps could be heard approaching their cell at a steady pace. Astrid quickly put on her discarded shirt and sat up tall, conveying her unshattered dignity to whoever was nearing. Hiccup joined her as they apprehensively awaited the first obstacle of their day.

Dark brown eyes peered into their cell, followed by a devious smirk. Hallerna eyed Astrid before directing her gaze to an incredibly cross and fuming Hiccup. She sighed in amusement and mocked Hiccup's grimace.

"Did she cry as much for you as she did for all of us?" Hallerna teased, "They were silent tears, of course. Probably my favorite type of crying. They're the result of hopelessness and embarrassment, of a need to look strong when all you really are is deficient and inferior."

The strain in Astrid's jaw tightened as she bit back obscene words that would surely get her killed if she let them slip. She placed her hand on Hiccup's clenched fist resting against the stone floor, and squeezed it bracingly. It was obvious that Hallerna was playing her favorite game of taunting torment.

"Hiccup, if you're worried about me hurting your dearest again, you shouldn't be. I have quite the day planned for YOU instead."

"After all that you've done, would you be that surprised if I refused to go?"

"If that's the case, I can always take Ms. Hofferson instead. Maybe give her a matching peg-leg, hm? Really, Hiccup, you should know better than to refuse me. Besides, I think you'll want to see what I have to present to you."

Slowly, Hiccup stood. He pulled Astrid up beside him and hugged her, putting his mouth to her ear as he whispered in the most hushed tone imaginable, "I'll challenge her at sunset. Be careful." Astrid kissed him in response until Hiccup felt Hallerna tug at his shoulder and break them apart. She shoved Astrid aside and undid Hiccup's chains from the wall.

"Let's go, Hiccup. Life's a-wastin."

Hallerna kicked his bad leg as she urged him on ahead of her. She directed him toward the Dragon Stable which appeared to be the only building still in tact. Misery flooded his gut as he spotted the ashes of his own house among the remaining wreckage of the village. It appeared that the pirates were housed on their ships, none putting forth an effort to rebuild the village and claim it as their own.

As they neared the Dragon Stables, Hiccup saw the platform where he

assumed they had brought Astrid yesterday. It was near the Dragon Training arena where his father used to make announcements. While the arena would be the perfect viewing space for a fight, Hiccup worried that it might be too close to the stables. If a single pirate caught sight of the Vikings breaking in, there would be little time to save the dragons and get out. He prayed that the action, noise, and darkness of the evening would be enough to cloak their escape.

When he arrived at the entrance to the stables, Hallerna yanked his chain abruptly and stepped in front of him, "You know, you and I are quite alike. We both lead our people with the best intentions in mind, protect what is most dear to us, and have a thirst for the unknown."

"Although I doubt that's even remotely true about you, there's one thing that separates the two of us. You're a psychopath who takes pleasure in torturing and humiliating people!"

"A captain must get her hands dirty. It's a sad but true fact. Perhaps, when I show you what I have waiting inside, you'll understand my reasoning."

"Don't bet on it."

She squinted her eyes and prepared to open the door, "We'll see."

* * *

><p>Astrid felt as if the prison walls were closing in on her. She had paced every which way as she anxiously waited for the pivotal moment of her evening. Her stomach was growling, begging for food to clench her hunger. The gash on her back was throbbing and made breathing a gruesome task to carry through. All in all, Astrid was completely miserable.<p>

She was mad at herself for letting all that had happened play with her emotions. A Viking wasn't supposed to show weakness of any sort. Yet, that's all she felt through every limb and every breath. She was thankful that Hiccup hadn't witnessed her torture and seen the tears that had streamed down her face. She would've been content going her whole life without him knowing about it. But she knew that Hiccup didn't care if she showed fragility. He had known her too long to even doubt that she had a vulnerable side tucked away. In fact, he was probably the only person who had ever truly witnessed it.

As the day passed by, Astrid remained consumed in her thoughts. The pain in her back was growing worse but she tried to block it out with thoughts of Hiccup and Stormfly and everything that she held dear.

When even that wasn't enough, she began to run through the plan in her head, memorizing every detail to it's fullest extent. Each step had to be performed spotlessly and leave nothing behind. She drafted a speech to tell all the escapees and figured out which duties would go to each person. If it all ran smoothly, the vikings could disappear without a trace.

* * *

><p>"This way," Hallerna said as she escorted Hiccup to the center of

the stable. When she reached it, she paused and motioned for a pirate nearby to open a stable door in the distance.<p>

"Now, what I'm about to explain to you might sound a bit bizarre. Maybe even impossible. But it most certainly will fascinate you," Hallerna stated proudly, "Bring out the dragon."

From behind the stable doors rolled out a baby dragon, thrashing against the chains that held him to his cage. It whined as Hallerna came into view, and desperately tried to detach itself from its entrapment. Hallerna took this as an encouragement to go closer. It looked to Hiccup as if she enjoyed every bit of torment she caused.

"Hiccup, rumor has it that you're the Dragon Master. So I suspect that means you know a lot about dragons. Perhaps the most. Would it shock you to know that there's another side to dragons that you don't know about?"

"What are you talking about?"

"Dragons are superior to us in many ways. Their longevity. Their remarkably enhanced senses. Of course, their ability to fly and breathe fire. They are the ultimate weapon without even trying. The alpha species... What if we could change that?"

Hiccup did not like where this conversation was going at all.

"What if we could use dragons to become more like them. Can you imagine how powerful we would be as a species? We could conquer every last person that gets in our way. We could dominate the world."

"This beast," she gestured toward the frail baby, "is one of the many dragons that will help my people toward that goal."

Her hand grazed fresh lacerations across the dragons forearm before walking over to a table and grabbing a goblet, "The liquid that lies in this cup is something I discovered throughâ€| experimentation. Within each dragon, their blood carries a unique trait that can essentially be transferred to whomever consumes the extract. It mutates our blood temporarily, and with it, you gain dragon-esque abilities. Now, this is where you come in. I have so graciously decided to offer you a truce. One I hope you will deeply consider."

"Your lives for your dragons. Unless, of course, you'd like to join me in my mission."

Hiccup felt disgusted. Repulsed. The fact that she was performing such unscrupulous and inhumane experiments on innocent creatures. That fact that she believed this madness! Hiccup thought back to his first impressions of Drago, of a hope that maybe he could change the man's mind. When he looked at Hallerna, he saw a lost cause. Hallerna's ambitions were much more sickening. It made his skin crawl.

"Even if that were true, Hallerna, do you honestly think I would ever WANT to do that? To torture a dragon for something as selfish as a thirst for power? If you thought we weren't enemies at first, well,

we most certainly are enemies now!"

"Dragons are not meant to coexist with humans. It is our job to show them their place."

"Have you ever met a dragon?! They're amazing creatures! They don't cause harm unless they're subjected to it!"

"It appears you don't know as much about dragons as I was made to believe."

"I know one thing for certain. That dragons aren't meant as a life source for someone as pitiful as you. You're delusional! You need to stop!"

There was a sudden strain in the air before Hallerna slammed the cup down and strode up to Hiccup with an untamed fury, "We'll see whose pitiful when I burn every last Berkian to ash! And when they are a breath away from death, I will make it known that you were the reason they are inferior. That their last dying moment was served toward a useless ruler who was too self-assured to heed my warnings. To listen to me."

"You will not slaughter my tribe! You will not torture these dragons!"

"Says the man who's chained up and defenseless."

"So, let's see what I'm like when I'm not at a disadvantage! I challenge you to a duel at sundown in front of the whole fleet. To the death!"

Hallerna looked intrigued now, her sudden aura of confidence becoming very troublesome to the young chief. It appeared she was not the least bit threatened by her adversary, and even seemed gleeful as she backed away and studied his frame.

"Sundown, it is. Just know that after I kill you, I will destroy every single thing that you hold dear. Starting with Astrid."

She walked back over to the table, took a swig of the extract in her cup, and then walked off. A pirate standing watch nearby took Hiccup to an empty stable and locked him up inside. When he was alone, Hiccup let out a shaky breath that he didn't realize he had been holding. Closing his eyes, he tried to restore his energy and relax his troubled thoughts. It was barely doing him any good though.

If Astrid, the most capable warrior he knew, couldn't defeat Hallerna, then he most certainly couldn't either. He remembered how Astrid had described Hallerna's inconceivable endurance when they fought.

Was it because she had taken some of the extract? Did it actually work?

No, that's insane.

Either way, Hiccup felt doomed. Although seeing his father was great in his dreams, he definitely didn't want to join him in Valhalla anytime soon.

* * *

><p>The small cell window let in a portion of the sun's rays as it dipped down toward the sea. Astrid guessed that the pirates would be bringing her meal in about ten minutes. Food sounded glorious at the moment, but Astrid shoved the temptatious thoughts out of her mind. She had no time to stop and indulge her rumbling stomach. She only had time to escape and save Hiccup.<p>

It wasn't that she didn't believe that he could defend himself. More so, it was Hallerna that kept her nerves on high. The captain obviously had special tricks up her sleeve; the past two days were evidence enough. If Hiccup grew too tired or his leg put him at a disadvantage, Hallerna would annihilate him.

As if the day couldn't get any worse, the gash on her back was becoming even more excruciating, to the point where she could barely move her left arm without pain erupting within. Her breaths were coming in shallow to ease the pain, but that would be a challenge once she was out. The obstacles were piling higher and higher, to the point where she was sure she would be smothered if they came tumbling down.

As usual, the world seemed to care little about her struggles as the sound of the dungeon doors opened. Astrid heard nasty grumbles as door hatches were opened, and plates clanked down. The stomp of hefty footsteps gradually grew closer until they were only a cell away. Astrid took a deep breath and waited earnestly.

When the guard came into view, Astrid jumped to the cell door and stuck her hand through the bars. She grabbed ahold of the pirates shirt, catching him off guard as he dropped her food. Her grip on his shirt tightened as Astrid wailed, "Please let me out! Hiccup needs me! I can't take this agony any longer!"

To distract him even further, she let out a loud sob and began to shake him violently. He was completely oblivious to the hand that sneaked into his vest pocket and grabbed the key. In fact, he seemed pretty amused by Astrid's incredibly convincing acting.

"Listen here you little sissy," he hissed, forcefully pushing Astrid onto the pile of her long chains, "For ruining my lovely shirt, your meal is goin' in the garabage. And to add to your list of things to cry about, your boyfriend will be as good as dead by the end of the night. If only I could be there to watch him scream as the Captain rips him to shreds. Now, enjoy your misery."

The burly man thumped off as Astrid recovered from her blow to the ground. Her wound was prickling from the way she had landed, and it took several minutes for breathing to become bearable again. With one last restoring exhale, Astrid jumped up and made quick use of the key. She hadn't realize how battered up her wrists were until her shackles were removed.

It didn't matter though. Bruising was the least of her worries as she unlocked her cell door and tip-toed down the hall. The vikings began to stir and peak their heads out as they heard Astrid unlock the first cell. She motioned for everyone to remain silent as she stealthily made her way across the dungeon floor. Five minutes was

all it took to escape their lockups.

Now, the real challenges began.

* * *

><p>Hiccup jumped awake to the sound of doors opening. The pirate who had jailed him there earlier was now walking over with a collection of objects in his arms. He dropped it at Hiccup's feet and told him to chose one and chose wisely. When he inspected the items closer, he realized they were weapons.<p>

A sword, an axe, a knife, a shield. His fire sword!

He grabbed it quickly and felt a small slither of security return. Soon after, the pirate escorted Hiccup out of the small stable and toward the table where there rested two matching goblets. From the other side of the room, Hallerna walked out with her hands behind her back.

"I see you picked the firesword," she revealed her own in her right hand, "Let's see who's the superior wielder. But before we go out to the brawl, I would like to give you the chance to drink the dragon extract. It only seems fair that we both have an equal advantage."

A fire raged behind the chief's eyes as he stood up proudly and refused.

"Mm, it's your loss," she warned before gulping down her share, "You better enjoy these few moments. They will be your last."

She strutted ahead, her wickedness visible to all that were waiting outside.

The journey to the arena was a bit of a blur. As he walked outside, the mass of pirates waiting around cleared a path. Hiccup was met with profane remarks and jabs as the pirates towered over him and egged him on.

Before he knew it, he was at the center of the arena, face to face with Hallerna. He was un-cuffed when a horn blew in the distance, silencing the restless audience. Hallerna unsheathed her sword, causing flames to erupt as she swung it around. Hiccup did the same and their battle commenced.

* * *

><p>Detaining the two guards had been a lot simpler than Astrid predicted. It only took a bang to the head to knock them out cold and place them in the cells they had once guarded. She took the spare cuffs and knife that each of them carried and placed them in her belt sheath.<p>

As she had ordered, the vikings trekked to the stables cautiously, but the lack of civilians made it an incredibly easy task. In the distance, you could hear the yells of obstreperous pirates watching Hiccup's duel. The noise played with Astrid's emotions, each uproar feeding her uncertainty.

_Focus! Focus! Focus! _she commanded herself. The next strenuous task

was going to require her full attention. Their lives depended on it.

As they neared a corner, Astrid paused. She peeped over the edge to see two pirates leaning lazily against the stable entrance and chatting. She signaled for the brawnier men of the group to join her at the front.

"Surround them so they can't escape. Once we've apprehended them, we'll need to knock 'em out and lock them up!"

On the count of three, the group raced head on toward the unsuspecting guards. Again, Astrid was surprised by how smoothly their plan was rolling along. It took a kick to the groin and a slam to the head to seize the two men, and that was all Astrid's doing. The group seemed encouraged by the future-chieftess' ability and mimicked her confidence as they hurried toward the now unguarded door.

When they entered the stables, they threw the two men into an open pen and chained them to the ground. Astrid emptied their pockets of any weapons and keys while the others began to free and prepare the baby dragons.

When she was finished, Astrid began her search for Toothless' pen. The majority of them remained empty, the number of rooms far exceeding the number of dragons at the moment. Worry choked her insides as she found herself roaming the more obscure hallways for the concealed Night Fury. The vikings were already placing saddles on the dragons' backs and Astrid had yet to find her own source of escape. Much less his harness and tail fin which she assumed were hidden away some place else.

Her hope was about to falter when she spotted a closed pen at the end of the hall. The heavy-set metal doors reminded her of the ones used in the dragon arena. The ones that reinforced only the most powerful of dragons. The silhouette of a left tail fin and saddle that hung in the shadowed corner confirmed her suspicions.

The hallway muffled all the noise from the main area, and made her sprint to Toothless' cage extremely eerie. Before she entered, she grabbed Toothless' flight equipment and an ax that was lying nearby. She slung the ax's strap over her shoulder and felt her upper back spasm as it landed heavily on her wound. She quickly removed it, trying to compose and steady herself against the knob of the door. But the weight of her body against the door cracked it open slightly, revealing the darkness within. Curiosity overcoming her pain, she skulked inside.

She couldn't see anything in the pitch black. It swallowed her whole. A low rumble reverberating across the walls, followed by a swift swoosh and thump of feet was the only sign of another life in there. Astrid felt the wind get knocked out of her as Toothless pinned her to the ground sharply and let out a strident growl. It took several seconds, but thankfully the blue that illuminated from his back shone upon her, making it clear who he was attacking. He let out a worried coo and gently got off of her.

"Don't worry. I'm alright."

He whined quietly and nudged her.

"Toothless, it's fine. I'm gonna get you out of here. You think you could light some hay in here so I can see you?"

Astrid waited patiently but nothing happened. She heard him whine again.

"Okay, then. Let's go outside instead."

Grunting in agreement, Toothless scuttled out into the dim hallway. Although his form was slightly shrouded by shadows, Astrid could make out abrasions all across his body and a harness across his mouth. It made her chest grow tight.

She swiftly removed the leather bounds from his snout and received a smile of gratitude in return. As she prepared his harness, she was careful to avoid all the marks of maltreatment. When her task was complete, she hopped on his back and patted his neck softly.

"We need to go save Hiccup."

At the mention of his best friend, the dragon took off. When they reached the main floor of the stables, they were met with ready vikings waiting restlessly. She halted Toothless and observed each determined face before her.

"It's now or never, everybody. Do as I said and we should all make it out. Don't dawdle, don't hesitate, and don't get caught!" she motioned Toothless toward the front of the group, stopping directly at the door.

"Let's do this."

* * *

><p>The collision of the two fire swords emitted a flurry of sparks that highlighted Hallerna's grotesque expression. The snarl that graced her lips made her into the wild beast that she claimed she could be. Her concentration laid solely on his destruction, and every swing she delivered was with an intent to slaughter. While Hiccup had yet to see her fly or breathe fire, he didn't think that was necessary to display how much she resembled a dragon in strength and stamina.<p>

As she slid the sword up to readjust her stance, she kicked Hiccup square in the chest and sent him plummeting to the ground. He rolled to his side, making the blow much less of a hindrance in the process. As she swiped down toward his middle, Hiccup continued to roll until he was a safe enough distance away to stand up and reposition himself.

He was already beginning to feel exhausted. It was well past sunset now, and the Moon was beginning to peek out between the translucent clouds. Hiccup had already had several close encounters with death since they'd started and if this situation kept going, he might not be so lucky next time.

The crowd started to roar as Hallerna stalked toward her prey again. Hiccup suspected that she was trying to catch him off guard, that at

any moment she'd pounce. That was her style after all, to destroy your energy until you didn't stand a chance. To make you beg for death after such a prolonged time trying to escape it. Hiccup wouldn't let that happen though. There was too much waiting for him outside the arena's walls.

When she leaped in Hiccup's direction, he met her with a relentless power fueled by the people he was fighting for. This seemed to catch Hallerna slightly off guard. Her arms stiffened as she unsuccessfully tried to regain her composure. It was rather difficult as Hiccup continuously whacked away at her, cornering her into the wall.

Relief flooded his insides as he heard the shrill cry of a night fury in the distance.

About time!

The explosion of a fireball sent smoke into the air, clouding everything in sight except for a black mass with piercing green eyes.

Those very eyes soon caught sight of him and hurriedly sprinted over. Before Hiccup could reach him though, he heard the clatter of metal against wood and felt his balance give away. Hiccup saw the Night Fury's eyes widen before he went toppling toward the coarse stone floor as Hallerna chopped through his peg leg.

Toothless grew enraged. As Hallerna swung her sword toward Hiccup, it was blocked by a head of scales. Toothless let out a roar of discomfort before nodding his head up forcefully, sending Hallerna into the wall. Before she could collect herself, Toothless shot a fireball over her head that sent the walls crumbling down on top of her.

Speedily, Toothless scooped up Hiccup and placed him on the saddle behind Astrid. He pounced at the opening he had blasted through earlier and began to soar toward the sky.

Below, there was an uproar of commotion as pirates hustled this way and that. Some tried to shoot at them but the majority were in the arena, hurrying toward their master whose fate was unknown.

It didn't matter all that much to Hiccup as the distance grew between him and the island. For now, all he desired was to grasp the waist of his dearly beloved and hold her tightly.

She squeezed his arm as he held her possessively, "Are you alright?"

"Much better now that you're here. Did the others make it out okay?"

"We'll find out soon enough. We agreed to rendezvous at that cliff side you and I sometimes frequent."

"Okay, sounds good," he replied, leaning in to her back to kiss behind her earlobe. Where he expected a sigh in reply, he was met with a shriek.

Astrid hunched over and heaved to the side while Hiccup leaned away as far as possible. He noticed her body trembling and examined for the source of her strange spasms but there was nothing that stood out.

"Astrid, what's wrong?!"

She tried to utter words but they remained incoherent as she struggled and gasped for breath. With every amount of energy she had, she raised her right hand across her front and pointed down toward her left shoulder. Hiccup scooted closer and pulled down the sleeve of her shirt. His heart dropped at the sight.

The once small gash on her back was now swelled to at least two times its original size. Red streaks surrounded the wound and looked like fire underneath her pale skin. Although his medical knowledge wasn't vast and plentiful, he was certain that her wound was infected. And it was not mild in the least.

"Toothless, we need to land now!"

Astrid protested through gasping breaths, "Hiccup. W-we need to keep going."

"Toothless, NOW!"

The dragon listened to his best friend and urgently searched for a landing platform, but all they could see was an expanse of curling blue waves. It took several minutes for rocks to start peeking out of the ocean's surface, usually a sign that land was nearby. They followed them as they grew higher and eventually towered over them.

Fortunately, the rocks were familiar. As they neared the tallest one on the horizon, Hiccup spotted the cliff side that they intended to meet the other vikings at.

When they landed, Hiccup wobbled to the ground and carefully dragged Astrid down with him. She was trembling again, beads of sweat sliding down her face as she looked at Hiccup through heavily lidded eyes.

As he gently rolled her to the side and shimmied down her sleeve, he felt her hand weakly tap his leg. He looked into her distressed eyes and tried to give her a soothing look. He assumed she probably saw the same distress reflected into his own eyes, accompanied by shaking hands and rapid breath.

She motioned for his hand and he gave it to her tenderly. Her hands were clammy and warm, desperately clinging to the cool skin of Hiccup's fingers as she interlaced them with hers. The usually strong and radiant beauty looked brittle and vulnerable as she battled the infection that was consuming her.

Of all the things that could've gone wrong today, Hiccup had certainly never accounted for this. On the perch of this lone cliff side, Hiccup had never felt more forlorn. Astrid needed him, and he didn't know what to do.

Delicately, he placed her hand to his lips and hummed a song softly.

One they had danced to not that long ago. It was a comfort then and it was a comfort now as they anxiously waited for help to arrive.

* * *

><p>So I'm definitely gonna try to update a lot quicker than last time. Especially since I love writing nurturingworried-Hiccup and we should be getting a lot of that next chapter! (Sorry I put you through so much, Hiccup! It's for the best!) Anyway, I thought I should let you all know that I created a side blog for HTTYD! My url is haddockandhofferson if you'd like to check it out. :) I'll be accepting drabble requests and what not. Yeah, ummmm... I guess that's it! Feel free to favorite, follow, and review!**

End
file.